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A

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

On SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 1789,

WITH

SOME STRICTURES ON THE LICENTIOUS NOTIONS, AVOWED
OR INSINUATED IN THE THREE LAST VOLUMES OF
MR. GIBBON'S ROMAN HISTORY:

BY

MA. 1756.

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W. D. I. S. N. B. Y. D. D.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE Author of the following Discourse, having been under an obligation to preach before the University of Cambridge, a few weeks after he had finished reading Mr. Gibbon's Roman History, thought it would be no way improper to take that opportunity of making some remarks on His three last volumes; which it has been more the fashion to praise than to blame. Praises have indeed been bestowed on them with an unbounded liberality; and the few censures, which have been passed, for the most part, have touched them with a gentle hand. To account for this singular good fortune of a very licentious performance, it can only be supposed, though the loose notions of the great Historian, to a certain degree, have long been no secret, yet the extent, to which He has carried them in His last Publication, has not been much attended to. That He has attacked Christianity with all the advantages of a fine genius, and all the bitterness of an inveterate Adversary, is well known; (which is enough, one might think, to render any book less praiseworthy in the opinion of a Christian) but that He has trod in the steps of Voltaire, and pointed

pointed His artillery against every principle of natural as well as revealed Religion, does not seem to be so generally understood. Yet whoever will afford time for perusing the following Sermon, will find sufficient proofs of this; and therefore it may be of some use to forewarn the young and unwary, who have not yet read, and may hereafter read a much celebrated work, that many things in it can be reconciled only with unqualified Atheism.

A
S E R M O N, &c.

I Cor. I. 25.

THE WEAKNESS OF GOD IS STRONGER THAN MEN.

THAT no degree of weakness, or imperfection of power, can, in a strict or literal sense, be understood of the supreme Being, is an obvious and indisputable truth. The means, He thinks fit to make use of, may to us appear weak and unpromising; but they always produce their intended effects, and often accomplish purposes of the greatest moment, far beyond the abilities of the mightiest among the sons of men, when left to themselves.

In the words of the Text the Apostle had in view the original establishment of Christianity; which indeed affords a very interesting example of what is there expressed. Our

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Lord

Lord had pledged Himself to dispense to His disciples supernatural assistance in their ministry; but He had, at the same time, acquainted them, that this assistance would be of a gentle or pacific nature, and would have nothing in it of human violence. When He declared to Pontius Pilate, that "His Kingdom was not of this world," He plainly meant to be understood, that it was not to be erected or extended in the same manner as earthly kingdoms. Nor is it at all probable that a religion, founded on a crucified Saviour, could ever be designed to be propagated in that way. He, who submitted to a painful and ignominious death, when He could, by praying to His Father, have had legions of angels to rescue Him from His persecutors, was not likely to employ the sword of conquest to enforce the belief of His Gospel. That it ever was so employed we have reason to lament; as it has done more harm than good to the cause it was drawn to support. We have however one consolation, that this mischief did not begin, till the truth of our holy religion had been amply ascertained, on its genuine and proper principles, more agreeable to its own nature, to the ancient prophecies, and to the words of Christ. We know from authentic histories, that for the greatest part of three centuries, with very few intermissions, the sword was pointed against the Gospel. We see, arranged on one side, the Princes and Rulers of the world, some of whom, in Judea,

" having

“ having crucified the Lord of life,” did every thing in their power to stifle His Gospel in its birth, and to prevent its growth. They were assisted in this, as it should seem, not very difficult undertaking, by the Princes and Rulers of other countries : for “ the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles,” who did indeed want no stimulation, but were ready enough, of their own accord, to suppress what they looked upon as a dangerous superstition, by every species of arbitrary cruelty. On the other hand we see, in opposition to these formidable Potentates, the poor illiterate fishermen of Galilee, with some assistants equally contemptible in the eyes of mankind, commissioned by a master, who had perished on the cross, and possessed of no visible means of accomplishing the arduous task, which was assigned them. That Peter, and James, and John, with the rest of the Apostles and their adherents, should undertake so extraordinary a work, as to overturn the established religions, and introduce christianity in their room, unless they had infallible assurances of divine aid, is absolutely incredible ; but that they and their successors, without receiving that divine aid, should accomplish what they did, in so short a time, under such unfavourable circumstances, is much more so, and has never yet been rationally accounted for by those, who deny the interposition of the Deity in the propagation of the Gospel. The utmost exertions of a celebrated Historian have not solved the difficulty ;

culty; for after allowing all due weight to his elaborate and far-fetched arguments, our reason is neither "satisfied nor subdued;" and whatever may be the opinion of those, who pride themselves on seeing with "*philosophic* eyes," plain common sense rejects the idea of such wonderful effects being produced by human weakness, or by any other means than by the weakness of God. These Objections have long ago been fully and satisfactorily answered*; but, as the Author has thought fit to renew his attacks on Christianity, with less reserve and increasing rancour, I shall beg leave to offer a few observations on some passages in his last three volumes, which ought not to escape animadversion.

One of the most striking parts of that work is the account he gives of the origin, rapid progress, and final establishment of the power and religion of Mahomet; "whose success (he says) has perhaps too strongly attracted our admiration." He asks "if we are surprized that a multitude of proselytes should embrace the doctrine and the passions of an eloquent fanatic? or whether it seems incredible that a private citizen should grasp the sword and the sceptre, subdue his native country and erect a monarchy by his victorious arms†?" In all this we readily subscribe to his opinion; for though other favourable circumstances concurred, (which it is not at present

* By the Bp. of Landaff and several others, † Rom. Hist. vol. v. p. 272.

sent necessary to mention) the reasons He assigns — that “ Mahomet was alike instructed to preach and to fight, that He invited the Arabs to freedom and victory, to arms and rapine, to the indulgence of their darling passions in this world and the other,” may justly be admitted as second causes, by which the Almighty, without any immediate interposition, permitted the grand Impostor to acquire spiritual and temporal dominion. But can we read this account of that memorable event, without recollecting at the same time the different manner, in which Christianity was introduced and established? When we compare the gentle methods of conversion, used by our Saviour and His Apostles, with the violence and bloodshed, which accompanied the preaching of Mahomet; their inflexible attachment to truth and virtue, in opposition to prevailing prejudices, and without giving any indulgence to the vicious passions of men, in order to gain proselytes, or increase the number of their followers; — When we place this conduct in contrast with that of the pretended prophet of Arabia, acting in defiance of all moral restraints, accommodating his religion to his interest, and moulding it in such a form, as to have something captivating and attractive for men of all principles and persuasions, Jews and Christians, as well as Pagans; is it not obvious that a character every way unlike, or rather totally opposite, naturally results of the Founders of the two religions? and can we entertain a doubt, whether

whether Christ, or Mahomet, best deserved, or was most likely to receive the support of a pure and holy God? This circumstance is of no small weight, when added to strong and positive proofs, that such support was actually vouchsafed to the first preachers of the Gospel. We do not draw these proofs merely from their success, but we take into the account the peculiar situation they were in when that success was obtained*; when it was probable, that the name and memory of Christianity would have perished with its advocates, if that Omnipotent Being, whose "weakness is stronger than men," had not thought fit to exert it "to confound the mighty," and to erect a Kingdom purely his own in a way worthy of Himself. But the superiority of Christian doctrines, so evident to us, is so far from being acknowledged by the Roman Historian, that He frequently gives a decided preference to those of Mahomet. Thus while he impeaches the Catholick creed, and even the Gospel itself, of implying a plurality of Gods, He lavishes his praises on the Koran for asserting the Divine unity, and speaks of its permanency in so doing as deserving our wonder†. From whence, however, let me ask, did the Author of that heterogeneous and incoherent work derive so sublime an idea? was it not confessedly from the Jewish or Christian Scriptures, or from an intercourse with persons of one or other of the two religions, which are founded upon them?

* White's Bampton Lectures, p. 104, 105, &c. † Rom. History, vol. v. p. 272.

them? Let the first praise therefore be given where it is more justly due. And with regard to the duration of "that impression, pure and perfect (as it is called) which Mahomet engraved at Mecca and Medina *," our Historian has himself accounted for it, from the union of the regal and sacerdotal characters: for what wonder is it, that in countries, where the connexion between religion and the civil government is so intimate, the dependence so absolute of the one on the other, every part of their faith should be unchangeably permanent †? But the important truth in question is not less positively asserted in the Gospel ‡ than in the Koran, notwithstanding what our adversary insinuates to the contrary; and has always been so understood by the great body of Christians §, who, whatever they may have differed in, have agreed in acknowledging that there is but one supreme and true God. We might refer for proofs to the creeds and articles of all established churches, who must be allowed to be the best interpreters of the expressions they use, for it is surely hard and unreasonable that others should interpret these for them, in a different sense from what they themselves mean, and then charge them with opinions, which they disclaim and abhor. But our Author has given us to understand — that "an orthodox commentary will

* Vol. v. p. 273.

† White's Bampton Lect. p. 96.

‡ Matt. xix. 17. Mark x. 18. xii. 29. John xvii. 3, &c. &c.

§ Not excepting even the Manichæan Hereticks, Gnostics, Marcionites, &c. Lardner, vol. ix. last Edit. 8vo. p. 247, &c.

will satisfy only a believing mind," and we know that He is "armed" with what He is pleased to call a "general antidote against religious credulity." This however will not justify the liberties He has taken in sporting with the majesty of Omnipotence: for though, it must be confessed, the fanciful conceits of theologians have furnished abundant matter for the exercise of his talents, yet some bounds ought to be set to a licentious imagination, when employed on so awful a subject — "The high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity *;" and those, who find themselves disposed to be thus rash with their mouths, or with their pens, would do well to remember the words of Solomon, "God is in heaven and thou upon earth †."

We are further told, in favour of Mahometanism, that "the triumph of the Koran is more pure and meritorious, as it was not assisted by any visible splendour of worship, which might allure the Pagans by some resemblance of Idolatry ‡." Now what-

* Isaiah lvii. 15.

† Eccles. v. 2.

‡ Vol. v. p. 656. — It cannot however be denied that other allurements not much to the credit of the Prophet promoted the triumph of the Koran. Mr. G. has mentioned several: "that Mahomet invited the Arabs to arms and rapine, to the indulgence of their darling passions in this world and the other, &c." The Historian has elsewhere asserted (vol. vi. p. 441.) that "in the hands of the Turks the scymetar was the only instrument of conversion," and this indeed well agrees with the accounts we have from Himself and others of the proceedings of Mahomet and his successors in converting the countries they conquered. Where is then that pure and meritorious triumph of the Koran which with such evident partiality is extolled above that of the Gospel?

whatever splendour of worship has been at any time affected by Christians, it is certainly no part of the doctrine of Christ, was not used in the purer times of Christianity, and has nothing to do with the argument, by which the truth of the Gospel is proved from its quick propagation. But the corruptions of Popery, and some kindred practices of the Greek church, have furnished our Historian with an occasion, which He eagerly seizes, of considering Christians in general as Idolaters. Indeed we so often find ourselves thus described, and also stigmatized as Infidels, that we are ready to think we are reading a history wrote by a slave of the Grand Seignor, rather than by a subject of an English King, who adorns the title of Defender, not of the Mahometan, but of the Christian faith. We might be led into the same error, from the Author's collecting and displaying, with exultation and triumph, like a true Mussulman, many shocking profanations of the most solemn rites of the Christian church. But to what purpose these insults on the established religion of his country? Why is it that He says things so peculiarly offensive to a Christian ear? Are they for the amusement of his *philosophic* friends? Whatever the number of those Gentlemen may be, there are, we trust, many more among us, not less distinguished for literary eminence, who cannot read such impious violations of what they reverence as sacred without horror*; who think that

* Bishop Newton informs us (vol. i. 8vo. p. 174.) that two of the most eminent

that these anecdotes, with many others of the licentious and indecent kind, are not ornamental but disgraceful to his history, will not increase our stock of valuable knowledge, and ought to have been suffered to remain in the obscurity from whence He has drawn them *.

After thus treating the supreme Lord of all things with freedom and levity, and the Christian religion with insult, it was not to be expected that He should give any quarter to the clergy. Accordingly we find that He has taken no small pains to procure, and has indeed produced a copious list of enormous offences, with which they have been charged; and having done this He tells us that “to a *philosophic* eye their vices are far less dangerous than their virtues †.” I shall leave their virtues

ment of his brethren for their learning and station were so offended with Mr. Gibbon's former volumes, that one of these prelates laid them aside in disgust, and the other returned them upon the bookseller's hands: the subsequent volumes are, if possible, still more exceptionable.

* I have read (says Lord Bolingbroke) in one of the historians of the latter Roman empire, historians by the way whom I will not advise others to mispend their time in reading, &c.” — Can any time be more wretchedly mispent, than that which is employed in culling out of such works, and placing in a more conspicuous point of view, what, as Mr. G. expresses it, (vol. iv. p. 204.) “may not drop from the pen of the decent historian.” If the coarse taste of the middle ages be admitted as an apology for the original writers, an Author of brilliant talents, every way qualified for separating genuine metal from the surrounding dross, will not easily find an excuse, for retailing profane and obscene trash among a learned and polite people in the 18th century.

† 'Tis a common thing for infidel writers to compliment themselves and one another

virtues to answer for themselves; but with respect to their vices, I shall briefly observe; it is universally acknowledged they have been many and great. We plead guilty to the charge of having departed too much from the purity of the Gospel morals so early as the third century, and still more in the fourth; but in the fifth and succeeding ones, after the subversion of the western empire, "the impiety and licentiousness of the greatest part of the clergy arose to an enormous height*." Nor is it indeed a matter of surprize, that, in such barbarous and turbulent ages as these, the church should partake of the disorders of the state. When "darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people:" when the Patriarchs of the East † were promoted and deposed, in a capricious and irregular manner, by an imperial decree; and the Popes of the West, without any regard to merit, or character, or even common decency, were exalted to the throne of Rome, and held

another with the title of philosophers. This circumstance will lead to an explanation of the above cited paradoxical sentence. A *philosophic* eye, i. e. the eye of an infidel, sees much greater dangers to its own righteous cause from the virtues of the clergy than from their vices. Such an eye can see little or no good in the Reformation, except in a political view: for the Reformation, though it did not extirpate, did at least give a considerable check to those vices of the Popes and the Popish clergy, which Mr. G. paints in such strong colours; (I will not say "dwells on with malicious pleasure") and by restoring greater purity of manners among those, who separated themselves from the Church of Rome, presented objects still more disagreeable and alarming to a *philosophic* eye.

* Mosheim's Eccles. Hist. vol. ii. last Edit. p. 295.

† Mosheim, *ibid.*

held up scandalous examples of all kinds of immorality; these were not times to look for purity of manners among the inferior pastors. When men of rank and power*, ignorant and profligate, forced themselves into the highest stations of the church, and acquired an extensive patronage, by these means, it is easy to guess how they would make use of it, and what sort of clergy they would prefer †. The consequences were such as might naturally be expected; the salt of the earth had well nigh entirely lost its flavour; a very general and almost universal corruption overspread and disgraced the Christian world. But when the Historian offers an insinuation on this account, against our holy religion itself, nothing can be more fallacious, or less worthy of attention ‡.

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* Mosheim, vol. ii. p. 297.

† It had been usual some centuries before "to admit multitudes of people of all kinds without examination and without choice into the body of the clergy;" (Mosheim, vol. ii. p. 31.) but in the ninth century, "the patrons of churches, unwilling to submit their disorderly conduct to the keen censure of zealous and upright pastors, industriously looked for the most abject, ignorant, and worthless ecclesiastics, to whom they committed the cure of souls. Mosheim, vol. ii. p. 297.

‡ However fashionable it may be to consider the vices of the clergy as a reproach to Christianity, the imputation is not founded in truth or reason; for "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good," though men are carnal. Indeed they, who take possession of a living as of a temporal estate, without a sense of any duties resulting from the one, any more than from the other, ought rather to be regarded as lay impropiators, than as clergymen; and if they are suffered to enjoy their emoluments in luxury and idleness, this is all they have
a right

An argument may more justly be drawn in its favour,—that under such disastrous circumstances, as must have overwhelmed a work of man, it was providentially supported and preserved; was cleansed and purified from the numerous pollutions by which it had been disfigured, and restored again to the rank it has since held, and still holds among wise and good men.

As to what our Author has thrown out of “the modern clergy subscribing the articles of faith with a sigh or a smile,” and other insinuations of like import; as if they either prostituted their consciences from motives of interest and ambition, or looked on religious establishments in the contemptuous light which He does Himself, it will be then time to answer such abuse, when He can prove Himself possessed of the Divine Prerogative of searching the hearts of Men; ’till then, such aspersions are illiberal and deserve no reply.

But the insinuations, scattered in these volumes, are not only attacks on Christianity, and the ministers of it, for they tend to subvert all religion natural as well as revealed. In
what

a right to expect, and more than all. When they are guilty of immoralities, and give scandal, let them at least bear their own burden; lay it not to the charge of Christ, for they are not His ministers or servants, they serve another master, and our Saviour has told us that “no man can serve two.”

what other view can we consider the praises, so liberally bestowed by the Historian, on "a salutary indifference" for religious doctrines? His speaking of a future state as "perhaps an ideal object*?" of prayer not as a natural or reasonable duty, but as "an art of devotion†," which "relaxes the mind‡;" though He is so civil indeed as to allow it to be "laudable or innocent;" his condemning public supplications, in cases of national calamities, as "servile homage to deprecate the wrath of an avenging Deity§?" Indeed, whether He really believes in the existence of a Deity He has left us to guess, from the loose way He expresses himself on several occasions; particularly, when He says of the heavenly bodies, that "the character of eternity is marked on these solid globes, and that they seem incapable of corruption or decay||." But if He admits the existence of a supreme Being, he does not appear to admit His moral and physical perfections; for the words he uses imply that they are inconsistent, that, on account of the existence of evil, the Deity cannot be omnipotent and infinitely good; or that His attributes of power and goodness cannot either of them be exalted to perfection, but at the expence of the other‡.

With

* Vol. vi. p. 524.

† Vol. v. p. 274.

‡ Vol. v. p. 471.

§ Vol. iv. p. 327.

|| Vol. v. p. 190.

‡ Vol. v. p. 524. "in spite of our efforts, the goodness, and the power, of Ormusd

With such sentiments as these, we are not surprized to find, He considers it as a matter of mere chance, or entirely owing to the genius and fortune of Charles Martel, that the truth of the Koran, instead of the truth of the Gospel, is not demonstrated from the pulpits of Oxford ‡.

But those, who believe in an Almighty, and infinitely wise and good Creator of the universe, will not easily be seduced to think that He exercises no control over His own works. Historians of better principles have been always ready to acknowledge that, in the revolutions of states and empires, the hand of providence is often visible, and sometimes particularly striking; they have therefore no doubt of its exertions in other cases, where it is not so clearly or immediately discerned; and Christians, who are taught in the Gospel, that "not a sparrow falls to the ground without their heavenly Father," will not despair of His protection and support of true religion; of which they have such strong assurances

Ormusd are placed at the opposite extremities of the line; and every step that approaches the one must recede in equal proportion from the other.

To the abovementioned loose expressions and insinuations may be added Mr. Gibbon's undisguised approbation of Suicide, and the censures he has passed on Christianity for disallowing it, vol. iv. p. 414. I shall not insist on the destructive tendency of this doctrine to society; all I would notice is, that no one, who believes himself to be a created and dependant being, can with any shadow of reason suppose, that he has a right to "rush unlicensed to eternity."

‡ Vol. v. p. 409.

assurances from their divine Master. What though the candlestick * has been removed from the eastern churches, and that threatened judgement executed in a very awful manner? What though the Koran of Mahomet is now taught and propagated among those populous nations, which had for ages embraced the Gospel of Jesus? The corruptions of Christians paved the way for the success of the Impostor, and called him forth as a providential instrument of their correction. Let this be a warning to us not to be guilty of the like sins; but let it not be supposed that permission was ever given him to overrun Christendom without control; “hitherto shalt thou come but no further” was the decree of Heaven. And not only bounds have been set to his conquests, but a period is fixed to the duration of his empire; which must fall with his religion, if not sooner†, then most certainly—“when the Kingdoms of this world shall become the

* Rev. ii. 5. Though the threat here is addressed to the church of Ephesus in particular, it is understood by commentators to relate to the others also: and there cannot be, says Bishop Newton, a stronger proof of the truth of prophecy, than the state and condition of these seven once glorious and flourishing churches. *Dissertation on the Proph.* vol. iii. 8vo. p. 40.

† 'Tis generally believed, (says Mons. Volney) at this moment, throughout the Turkish empire, that the predicted hour is arrived, when the power and religion of the Mussulmen are about to be destroyed, and that the yellow (or Christian king) is coming to establish a new empire, &c.—*Travels through Syria, &c.* English Translat. p. 52, vol. i.—When such an opinion becomes universal, it must, according to the natural course of things, prepare the people among whom it prevails for subjection.

the Kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ †." At what distance of time these momentous events will happen, it does not become us too decisively to pronounce; let us rest satisfied, that the authority of our Saviour is continually growing greater by being farther extended; and that "the present state of the world affords a presumption, independent of all predictions, that Christianity will become the universal religion of mankind ‡." For though it is still kept down, and not suffered to erect itself, as we trust it one day will, in the regions of the east, its light shines with increasing brightness in other countries, and from thence continues to be diffused among those which are yet in darkness. Nor is it a matter of small consequence, that the time seems to be at hand, when some hundred thousands of our oppressed fellow creatures, who have been hitherto suffered to remain in our colonies abroad, immersed in the grossest ignorance, will be brought to the Knowledge of the true God; for we are not without hopes, that, when they are admitted into the number of Christ's subjects themselves, they may be instrumental in converting the Pagan inhabitants of their native land §.

Let us also not despond too much concerning the state of Christianity at home; though it does not meet with the support it deserves from many of those, who are most able to support

† Rev. xi. 15. ‡ Dr. Powell's Disc. p. 128. § Bp. Porteus's Sermon, p. 408.

support it; whose examples, being placed in a more conspicuous point of view, are apt to have the greater influence on the vulgar. If the Gospel was better understood, it would unquestionably be better valued, and more universally embraced. An Author of acknowledged candour has remarked—that “Men of rank and fortune, of wit and abilities, are often found, even in Christian countries, to be surprisingly ignorant of religion, and of every thing that relates to it*.” This must of course lay them open to receive for truths many ungrounded assertions of infidel writers, and to be perplexed by sophisms, which they are not qualified to examine. Nothing can plead more strongly for fortifying young men of this description, as early as possible, with Christian knowledge; and great praise is due to those, who have promoted that salutary work, in this eminent seat of religion and learning; for, “if it is not carried to a certain point, during the course of education in this place †,” it is too frequently neglected afterwards, and the unguarded mind is left an easy prey to the false philosophy, vain deceits, and destructive rudiments of the world.

But, whatever may be the state of Christianity among the rich of this nation, we have the satisfaction of knowing, that by means of a very laudable institution, to which too much

* Dr. Jortin's Disc. 3d. ed. p. 65.

† Bp. Porteus's Sermons, p. 194.

much encouragement cannot be given, it begins to be better understood by the younger part of the poor; and from the beneficial effects this has already produced, in all places where it has had a fair trial*, we may cherish hopes, that the great body of the people will in time obtain a clearer knowledge of their duty and become more exemplary in the practice of it. To the poor the Gospel was first preached by our Saviour, from them it was communicated to the rich and great. "The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save," "His weakness is still stronger than men," and His blessing may reasonably be expected on a design so congenial to the nature and spirit of Christianity, that it seems to have been pointed out by a divine ray of illumination from the Father of lights, as the best remedy and preservative, against the increasing licentiousness of modern times.

Upon the whole; though we cannot but lament the many
virulent

* The Author of this discourse can aver from personal experience, that a Sunday school has done much good in the small parish where he resides. Those who have any doubts, with respect to the utility of the institution, may obtain full satisfaction from perusing the Dean of Canterbury's Sermon on the Subject, with the appendix; Bishop Porteus's Letter to the clergy of the diocese of Chester; Plan of the Bath Sunday schools, &c. All objections against these excellent seminaries of religion, when managed as recommended in the above publications, have no force; and can only be raised or maintained by those persons, who think the *virtues of the poor are more dangerous than their vices*;—in other words, would sooner run the hazard of their turning out pickpockets and housebreakers, than have them brought up Christians.

virulent attacks on our holy religion, and particularly, that a writer of distinguished abilities, after making a most ample concession in its favour — “ that it diffused among the people a pure, benevolent, and universal system of ethicks, adapted to every duty and every condition of life *,” should nevertheless do every thing in his power to subvert it, and destroy its influence over the minds of men ; — though we cannot, I say, but lament this strange inconsistency of conduct, yet we can see it without extraordinary dismay, or alarming apprehension of any fatal effects that will result from it to Christianity. We were prepared to expect such events, our Saviour and His Apostles have forewarned us that such offences must needs come ; their prophecies have long ago begun to be fulfilled, and are still going on towards completion. Champions of different characters, but with the same views and designs, equally hostile to the Gospel of Christ, have stepped forth and entered the lists against it. It has been assaulted by Jews and Pagans, philosophers and historians, poets and buffoons †, by

* Rom. Hist. vol. iii. 8vo. p. 247.

† If they, who write buffoonery, have a right to this character, the great Roman Historian must be allowed to merit it by the notes to his last three volumes. Of Voltaire's title to it there can be no doubt. I beg to call the reader's attention to what Mr. G. has said concerning this unprincipled Frenchman, his fellow labourer in propagating infidelity. In vol. vi. p. 476. note 25. it is insinuated that the poet affected a knowledge of every thing—in the text of the same page that he rejected the positive and unanimous evidence of contemporary writers in.

by some also who have united several of these characters in one. " They have shot out their arrows, even bitter words," and have done their worst. But all these repeated attacks have only tended to establish what they were designed to overthrow. Christianity, in consequence of them, has undergone a more frequent, as well as a more severe examination; and has stood the test with credit and advantage*. Had it been a work of man, it must long ago have given way, and have come to nought. But God does not build " with untempered mortar" " His foundations stand sure" and firm, and
His

in a matter there treated of. His numerous errors are often spoken of by Mr. G. and some of them occasionally corrected. P. 32. note 65. His prejudices in favour of the schismatic Greeks, against the Catholick Franks, are considered as inexcusable in a philosopher; and p. 442. note 13. He is flatly pronounced to be " an intolerant bigot in his way," and is censured as partial to the Turks against the Christians. See also p. 511. note 84. The Beam alas in our Brother's eye is much more easily perceived than that in our own!

* Bishop Hurd's Sermons, vol. iii. p. 350, &c. — Mr. Hume has somewhere declared His opinion concerning the Newtonian Philosophy, that if it was able to endure the ordeal trial by modern scientific men, it would probably go down triumphant to the latest posterity. But He did not perceive the force of this argument in favour of Christianity, from its keeping its ground, after a long and severe examination by enlightened reason, for He had a *philosophic* eye, a *philosophic* ear, and a *philosophic* understanding; so that He could neither see, nor hear, nor understand the sacred truths of revealed religion. Yet the great Newton, the first of Philosophers, in the true and more genuine sense of the word, could see and acknowledge them; and has given a very honourable testimony to the authenticity of those scriptures, which the inferior reason of Mr. Hume arrogantly rejected. — See Bishop Watson's Sermons, &c. 8vo. p. 287.

His works bear the marks of their divine Author. He, " who only hath immortality" and omnipotence, was alone capable of erecting an eternal and impregnable structure. Such is the Church of Christ; " the gates of Hell" have not hitherto " prevailed," and we confide in the promise of our gracious Master, that " they shall not prevail against it."



